

Eric Rouleau

KHOMEINI'S IRAN

From the very beginning of the Iranian Revolution, the West—and particularly the United States—seems to have been struck by a peculiar sort of political blindness. The first signs of revolt passed unnoticed. The explosions of rage in the spring of 1978, first in Tabriz and then in Qum, were attributed to “obscurantist mullahs” hostile to the Shah’s agrarian reform. The immense demonstrations by millions of Iranians, as well as the strikes in the administrations, factories, schools, universities and oil fields which paralyzed the state and in the last analysis caused the monarch’s inglorious departure, were attributed to the “fanaticism” of the Iranian people. How could it have been otherwise, it was asked at the time, since the population was following a reactionary old cleric in revolt against a man who had devoted his entire life to modernizing his country?

Rare were those who suggested that modernity is not necessarily synonymous with progress or well-being, or that the concepts of economic development current in the West—where quick material gain is often the only valid criterion—does not necessarily correspond to the true needs and interests of developing nations. Rarer still were those who pointed out the pitfalls of labeling an entire people fanatics simply because they were virtually unanimous in expressing their will. Even a study of Iranian history and psychology would have revealed that the Iranians, while believers, are at the same time one of the least observant and most tolerant in the region. A mosaic of ethnic groups and religious communities, Iran has nonetheless been the scene of an astonishingly small number of strictly religious conflicts over the past two centuries.

If such is the case, how could Islam have played the role of prime mover in the Iranian revolution? To ask this question is to forget that other religions in other times and places have also provided an ideological dimension to political movements, and on occasion have been used to form states. The Italian preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) rose against the French invaders before establishing a regime in Florence which was at once

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theocratic and democratic. Jean Calvin (1509-1564), acting in the name of the Reformation, burned his religious and political opponents alive in the theocratic republic he headed in Geneva, but his ethic—which among other things glorified work and justified interest-bearing loans—contributed to the rise of capitalism, the development of political democracy and Western cultural values. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and the Puritans swept away the English royalty to establish the “Republic of the Middle Classes.” These three men serve as examples to illustrate the revolutionary role religion has played at one time or another in the West. All occupy prominent places in our history books, yet each was reviled by his contemporaries as cruel, sectarian, fanatical.

In seeking to evaluate Imam Khomeini's movement, Westerners, and particularly Europeans, have remembered only the French Revolution, a comparison which was comforting to those who judged the Iranian Revolution retrograde. Hadn't the French clergy, allied to the nobility and Louis XVI, opposed the forces of progress by opposing the demands of the Third Estate? And wasn't the Iranian Revolution led, organized and oriented by clerics incensed by reform? It is true that the Catholic Church is not, generally speaking, known as a liberating force and that in our societies the notion of secularism is inseparable from that of democracy.

In any case, despite any parallels or analogies which might legitimately be established, the Iranian revolution is like no other. It is *sui generis*. Hence, the difficulty of understanding its day-to-day evolution.

II

The rise of the Shi'ite clergy is rooted in the history and ideology of Shi'ism. Ever since the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam in the ninth century, no temporal power has been legitimate or equitable in its eyes. Justice will not reign in the Muslim community until the “great occultation” (as the Twelfth Imam's disappearance is termed) ends with his return to earth (the resurrection).¹ Every ruler—or ruling party—is by definition a usurper, since by the very act of ruling he is substituting himself for the Twelfth Imam, the only one with the right to execute the

¹ It is interesting to note that when the *ulemas* (doctors of Islamic law) demanded at the beginning of this century the election of a parliament, they called it the “house of justice” (*adalatkhaneh*).

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divine will. The Shi'ite clergy's natural tendency has thus been to contest the authority and actions of the various dynasties that have governed Persia, and especially to contest the royal power every time it tried to open the country to foreign influences apt to "pervert" Islam or introduce customs contrary to Muslim culture and tradition.

Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Shi'ism emerged as a kind of early anti-imperialist movement. In 1826, the *ulemas* declared a holy war against Russia. Three years later they had the members of an official delegation from St. Petersburg assassinated. They brought about the cancellation of the incredible monopoly for the exploitation of mines, forests, railroads, banks, customs and telegraphic communications granted to Baron Julius de Reuter in 1872. Their 1891 prohibition on tobacco consumption—largely observed by the population—led to the withdrawal of the tobacco monopoly accorded the previous year to a certain Mr. Talbot. Part of the clergy actively participated in the 1906 revolution aimed at establishing a constitutional regime. They did so not in the name of democracy—a "Western" notion abhorred even then—but to better control a royal power which favored European penetration. It was for the same reason that an important segment of the clergy under Ayatollah Kashani sided with Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1951 when the latter nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's interests in Iran.

The three favorite themes of the militant clergy—foreign domination, despotism, injustice—were precisely the evils suffered by the Iranian people under the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah. The Shah's agrarian reform benefited only a minority of the peasants, who, in any case, were soon taken over by big companies engaged in large-scale industrialized agriculture. The massive importing of agricultural goods, especially wheat from the United States—coupled with the absence or inadequacy of protective tariffs—contributed to the ruin of countless small farmers, aggravated rural unemployment and swelled the migration to the cities.

The Shah's modernization program—which created less an authentic development than a consumer society for privileged elites—quickly enriched the members of the royal family and the court, the entrepreneurs (almost all subcontractors for the large Western firms), the powerful merchants, the importers of spare parts and consumer goods, the speculators fostered by an unbridled capitalism worthy of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, those who suffered were legion: the small manufacturers

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and craftsmen squeezed by foreign competition, the workers (albeit well paid), the rapidly expanding middle classes, the millions of wage earners whose buying power was being eroded by a galloping inflation (over 50 percent in the two years preceding the fall of the monarchy).

The recession, which hit Iran as of 1976, increased the regime's unpopularity. Slumping oil sales and rising costs in imported materials forced the Shah to reduce considerably the credits allocated to development, giving rise to disillusionment commensurate with the grandiose hopes elicited by the oil boom of 1973-74. The austerity measures adopted seemed all the more unjustified in that the Shah continued to sink billions of dollars into useless military hardware, mainly from the United States, which piled up in his arsenals.

The middle classes wanted a constitutional system which would assure them the material security and political stability threatened by the arbitrary nature of the regime. The entire population demanded an end to the terror perpetrated by SAVAK, the formidable secret police. During the 37 years of Mohammed Reza Shah's reign, over a half million people are estimated to have been arrested, imprisoned or detained, briefly or for longer periods. Thousands of opponents or suspected opponents were packed off to the special courts; thousands were the victims of summary executions or assassinations, or died under the systematic practice of torture.

Most Iranians readily equated the regime which oppressed them with the United States, accused of having restored Mohammed Reza Shah to his throne in 1953 and keeping him there through the many forms of aid—political, economic, military and police—it supplied. It was notorious that the CIA worked closely with SAVAK, and that the Pentagon helped equip and train the imperial forces and advised them on a regular basis. American firms "pumped" the petrodollars out of Iran in exchange for needless armaments, industrial products and consumer goods. In the eyes of many Iranians, these "sales" were just another means of looting their country's resources.

III

In light of the above, one can more readily understand the dual nature of the uprising of 1978-79—dual in that it was directed as much against "American imperialism" as against the despotism of the Shah, considered two sides of the same coin. Largely spontaneous, the movement could very well have been taken in

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hand by Marxists or nationalists of the Mossadeq stamp. But the Shah's repression had pulverized the secular parties, traditional and otherwise. The National Front which came to prominence during the revolution was nothing but a collection of harmless notables—self-proclaimed heirs of Mossadeq who had somehow lost his prestige along the way. The leftist parties, such as the People's Mujahidin (progressive Muslims) or the People's Fedayeen (Marxist-Leninist), had concentrated too much on urban guerrilla activities and suffered too many human losses to be able to play a political role of far-reaching consequence. The Shi'ite clergy was thus a timely force, offering—in addition to its mobilizing ideology—the leadership and structure which was to assure the success of an enterprise that would otherwise have been doomed to failure.

The role of the clergy in Iranian society is considerable. Far more than the Sunni sheikh who is generally appointed and paid by the state, the mullah draws his livelihood from contributions of the faithful, with whom he shares prosperity or poverty, joys and sorrows. In the mosque or at the traditional gatherings he attends in private homes, virtually any issue of concern to the community is discussed; religion and politics are inseparable in Islam as in Judaism. The mullah can thus be a friend, confidant, adviser or guide for his flock, and acts as a moral support in times of adversity.

Using the sometimes considerable funds it collected (up to a fifth of the revenues of the faithful), the clergy established medical clinics for the needy, schools, and other social and philanthropic institutions during the Shah's reign. The preachers spoke out against social injustice, moral decay and corruption (understood to refer to that of the palace and its American advisers). They called for Islam's return to its roots as a way of defending national virtue and identity against the rape by Western technology. A good many men of the cloth experienced the Shah's prisons. Among the higher clergy, Ayatollah Taleghani, who died a few months ago, Ayatollah Mountazeri, considered to be the successor to Imam Khomeini, and Ayatollah Muhtazeri Rafsandjani, elected President of the parliament in July, suffered torture at the hands of SAVAK agents.

Imam Khomeini, who found refuge in the holy city of Najaf in Iraq, remained the distant symbol of this diffuse resistance. The political vacuum made him successively the standard bearer, catalyst, and finally the guide of the revolution. As a result of the positions he took during his 15-year exile, he appeared to embody

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the aspirations of various categories of the population. Shortly before his expulsion from Iran in 1964, he had become famous by publicly condemning both the Shah's violations of the Constitution and the granting of extraterritoriality to American civilian and military advisers and their dependents. "You have extirpated the very roots of our independence," he wrote from Najaf in 1967 to Prime Minister Hoveida.

This text, like so many others, was recorded and circulated clandestinely throughout city and countryside on tapes. In them, the Imam designated the United States as "the head of the imperialist serpent," accused the international monopolies of "looting" Iran's resources, complained of "domination" by foreign capital and the squandering of public funds in massive arms purchases. During the sumptuous festivities at Persepolis in 1971 marking the 2500th anniversary of the monarchy, he denounced the "insolent luxury" in which the Shah and his family lived. From the outbreak of the uprising in January of 1978, he incited the people to pursue their struggle until the fall of Mohammed Reza Shah. Disregarding many of his advisers, he insisted that the battle be waged without recourse to arms, and never tired of repeating that the Shi'ite faith would prevail over brute force. His calculation proved well founded: a year later, the imperial army—the most powerful in the Middle East after that of Israel—succumbed to "bare-handed revolutionaries" who had sacrificed tens of thousands of martyrs while achieving their victory.

IV

The second phase of the revolution opened shortly after Imam Khomeini's return to Iran in February 1979. It marked the beginning of the "anarchy," as the West called it—that classic phenomenon wherein the "sacred union" achieved around a common goal (in this case, the overthrow of the monarchy) explodes under the pressure of the centrifugal forces reflecting the interests, aspirations and political leanings of diverse groups of the population. Life more or less returned to normal. The ethnic minorities of the Shah's empire—Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, Turkomans and so on—were all the more pressing in their demands for self-determination in that most of them did not belong to the Shi'ite community. The Marxists—orthodox communists, Maoists, Trotskyites, and so on, who had marched in the demonstrations under the green banner of Islam while chanting the name of Allah—now set up shop on their own under the insignia of the hammer and sickle. The middle classes formed in the

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Western school raised the standard of secularism, advocating the maintenance of a liberal (social democratic) economy and the establishment of a parliamentary system based on the Western model. The Muslims themselves were divided among rightist, centrist and leftist factions, each under the patronage of an ayatollah of like persuasion. Finally, despite its apparent allegiance to Imam Khomeini, the Shi'ite clergy was just as divided as the secular political world which indeed it more or less faithfully reflected.

It has often been written that Imam Khomeini is an intransigent man who, by ideological conviction as well as by temperament, brooks no half-measures. Hadn't he rejected all offers of compromise with the Shah, despite the insistence of many of his followers? And again, hadn't he refused, in the immediate wake of the monarchy's collapse, the proposals for a government of national unity which would surely have reduced the futile and costly disorders which ensued? But Imam Khomeini does not identify himself with Iran as General de Gaulle did with France. As the head of Shi'ite Islam, he could not and cannot conclude "tactical alliances" with forces contesting or—worse still—opposing the dogmas he is duty-bound to defend.

This does not alter the fact that the "guide of the Islamic Revolution" has shown himself as capable of maneuvers or even ruses as any secular politician when he considers such indirect means necessary to achieve critical objectives. The appointment of Mehdi Bazargan as head of the provisional government on February 5, 1979, was perhaps one of these instances. Otherwise, why would Imam Khomeini have chosen a man whose ideas were so far removed from his own? It is true that Bazargan had been imprisoned four times for opposition to the Shah and that he had supported Khomeini in exile. But by his own admission he was no revolutionary. He had gone to Imam Khomeini's retreat at Neauphle-le-Chateau to plead the case of a "step-by-step" policy, which implied the maintenance of the monarchy. In short, he advocated a path similar to that taken by Shahpur Bakhtiar, a friend whom he never wanted to condemn as a "counterrevolutionary" or "traitor."

The government put together by Mr. Bazargan was strongly tinged with conservatism. His ministers belonged to the moderate wing of the National Front and included the Mossadeqists so despised by Khomeini, former officers of the imperial army, and middle-class businessmen who had grown rich under the Shah. As of his first days in office, he publicly expressed his disgust with the

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institutions born of the revolution: the "Komitehs," the Islamic militias, the revolutionary courts dispensing high-handed justice on royalist dignitaries and SAVAK torturers. The summary trials and hasty executions repelled him. Mehdi Bazargan was a man of order: he wanted to conserve the instruments of the old regime—army, police, state administration—keeping purges to a minimum so as not to lose "estimable and irreplaceable elements." A worthy representative of the "bazaar"—a term widely used to designate the merchants and middle classes—the head of the provisional government also did not intend to alter the bases of the economy: it was under some pressure that he decreed the nationalization of the banks, insurance companies and large industrial complexes. He also tried, unsuccessfully, to resist the "unauthorized" occupation of the great agricultural estates by landless peasants and the election of "workers' councils" to take charge of the factories.

Mehdi Bazargan is also a pious and practicing Muslim, but he never shared Imam Khomeini's view that "Islam should take precedence over Iran." He complained of the insidious infiltration of "ignorant and arrogant" mullahs into the administration. He voted in favor of the "Islamic Republic," but shortly before his resignation he confided to the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci that he feared a "dictatorship of the clergy."²

Two "mortal sins" precipitated Bazargan's fall: he opposed the Islamic constitution drawn up by the "assembly of experts" (composed almost entirely of clergymen), and he strove to normalize relations with the United States, Imam Khomeini's "Great Satan." It was on the Imam's orders that he reluctantly broke off diplomatic ties with Egypt after the peace treaty was signed with Israel in March 1979. He barely protested when the Shah was admitted to a New York hospital on October 22 and did not consider it useful to publicly demand the former monarch's extradition. A week later, he was shown on Iranian television engaged in cordial conversation in Algiers with Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in order to obtain, among other things, a resumption in the supply of matériel and spare parts for the Iranian army. That was the reason—or the pretext—invoked for the occupation of the American Embassy and the seizure of its diplomats four days later by some four hundred "Islamic students following the Imam's line."

² "Everybody Wants To Be Boss," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1979, p. 66.

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Imam Khomeini—who apparently had been informed that some such action was to be taken—had thus forced Mr. Bazargan to resign. Why had he waited nine months to do so? Hadn't he known from the very beginning that his prime minister was neither a "revolutionary" nor an enemy of the "Great Satan"?

Everything seems to indicate that the choice of Mr. Bazargan as prime minister was dictated by tactical considerations at a time when the Imam, recently returned to Iran, feared that the situation could slip from his control. The imperial army was still intact (and was not to collapse until February 12, one week after the provisional government was formed), as were the police force, the gendarmerie, the state administration. The Marxist parties (particularly the People's Fedayeen) and the People's Mujahidin were armed to the teeth and sought to outflank the Islamic movement, which was powerful at the popular level but completely lacking in the structures needed to exercise power (the Komitehs and Islamic militias were institutionalized only later). The middle classes, influential in the economy and in the government machinery, could easily slide into a dangerous passivity or seesaw among the moderate parties of the National Front.

Only Mehdi Bazargan seemed capable of juggling all these perils. The "bazaar"—Muslim and relatively conservative—was devoted to him. The leftist formations (especially the Mujahidin) thought they could count on his liberalism to secure a legal status in the young republic. A number of high-ranking officers—some of whom had secretly negotiated a compromise with him—had confidence that he could assure the army a smooth transition from empire to republic. In appointing him prime minister, Imam Khomeini thus hoped to buy time, the time needed to establish a "true revolutionary government." But this did not mean he gave him any real power. Mr. Bazargan was permitted to make endless declarations and protests over radio and television, but the essential decisions came from the clergy-dominated Council of the Revolution. It was Mr. Bazargan himself who, in the interview with Oriana Fallaci, best described his situation: "They've put a knife in my hand, but it's a knife with only a handle; others are holding the blade."

The seizure of American diplomats as hostages in Tehran sounded the death knell of the Bazargan government. It also brought into the open the conflict between Iran and the United States, which had lain dormant since the collapse of the monarchy.

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Imam Khomeini had not forgiven the seven Presidents who have occupied the White House during the past 30 years for their unflinching support of the bloodthirsty dictator most Iranians saw in Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Nor was the Imam prepared to forget that Mr. Carter had tried to save the Pahlavi dynasty to the bitter end. The ex-Shah's admission to the United States in October 1979 confirmed him in his suspicions that the American Administration was seeking to reestablish the fallen monarch on his throne. The American gesture, praised as "humanitarian" and "courageous" in the West, was perceived in Tehran as a new and intolerable provocation. As Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh remarked to this writer: "It is as if Franco's Spain had offered to treat Hitler for cancer immediately after the Second World War." The only merit of the image is that it reflects the frustration and anger felt by the Iranians. The United States had seriously underestimated their potential reaction, just as it had seriously underestimated the profound motivations of the revolution itself.

In the view of certain observers, the Carter Administration committed the same error before and after the hostage crisis: it believed it could clear up the Iranian-American dispute by dealing with the "moderate" leadership in Tehran—first with Mr. Bazargan and his ministers, then with President Bani-Sadr and Mr. Ghotbzadeh. Washington believed this to be the most accessible route, but in reality it was blocked. It is true that the new chief of state and his foreign minister disapproved of the Islamic students' occupation of the American Embassy and favored normalization with the United States. But it was precisely these inclinations that undermined their credit with Imam Khomeini, at the same time weakening them in the face of their adversaries, particularly within the clergy.

In the last analysis, the American government could have played the "moderate" card successfully if it had been prepared to make enough concessions to give the moderates credibility in the eyes of Iranian public opinion. President Bani-Sadr had dropped his demand for extradition of the Shah. In exchange, he asked that the United States admit its responsibility in the crimes committed by the Shah and that it undertake not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs again. It is not to be excluded that Bani-Sadr could have delivered had his demands been met. At the very least, the climate would have changed significantly enough to open the way for the release of the hostages. But the White House did not understand that a price had to be paid for normalization. President Carter wouldn't even dissociate himself from the CIA-

led coup of 1979. If it is true that the Shah was "overthrown" in such a manner, it could have been a demand of the hostages' release.

To explain that the multiparty dialogue imposed on the Iranian government to undertake negotiations for the internment of a hostage, that the low price since the abduction analysis which the Islamic students at least as much operation directed.

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led coup of 1953 which restored Mohammed Reza Shah to power. If it is true that a great power cannot permit itself to be "humiliated" in such a fashion, one can ask oneself how a compromise could have been concluded without satisfying at least the minimal demands of the other side. Surely no one expected to obtain the hostages' release with nothing given in return.

To explain the failure of the negotiations, it has often been said that the multiplicity of power centers in Tehran made serious dialogue impossible. But once again, if such were the case, why undertake negotiations with one of these centers instead of waiting for the internal struggles to resolve themselves with the establishment of a homogeneous and responsible government? It seems that the low profile the Carter Administration has been observing since the abortive rescue mission of April 1980 flowed from an analysis which could have been supported as of last November: the Islamic students' occupation of the American Embassy was at least as much—if not more—a domestic political maneuver as an operation directed against the United States.

Indeed, it was clear from the outset that Imam Khomeini was going to utilize the widespread anti-American feelings to mobilize the population under his banner. Popular discontent—due mainly to economic problems and the duality of power—had reached alarming proportions by October 1979. The government (along with the secular nationalists and most of the leftist parties) was preparing to resist the adoption of the draft Islamic constitution then being drawn up. The occupation of the American Embassy thus came at the perfect time, pushing divisive factors to the background and uniting the people against the Shah's protectors. The same mechanism applied after the rescue mission of April 25: the U. S. attempt provided Khomeini with tangible evidence that the principal danger threatening the Iranian people was foreign intervention.

VI

The third phase of the revolution—following those of the uprising against the imperial regime and the founding of the Islamic Republic under a provisional government—was opened by Mr. Bazargan's resignation. Immediately after the seizure of the hostages, Imam Khomeini labeled the new phase the "second revolution." The patriarch of Qum had clearly decided that his faithful prime minister had outgrown his usefulness: the imperial army, decapitated and purged by the Islamic Komitehs, no longer represented a danger for the republic; the large industrialists who

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had controlled the economic power had been dislodged from their positions by various measures, including massive nationalizations. All that remained was to neutralize the representatives of the middle classes, the "moderate nationalists" who had been reviled publicly as "Westernized liberals" ready to "compromise with imperialism."

The task of ferreting out this new enemy fell to the Islamic students. They were doubly popular in the country at the time: they had defied all-powerful America—a role magnified by the importance conferred upon them by the American mass media and Administration—and they projected themselves as being at once the conscience and the instrument of the revolutionary movement. They were thus in a position to proceed, under the discreet protection of Imam Khomeini, with the elimination of the opponents of the Islamic regime.

Using more or less convincing documents—but impressive insofar as they came from secret archives of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran—the Islamic students succeeded in having numerous politicians or parties who passed for pro-Western in the Iranian Revolutionary context arrested or discredited. Mr. Amir Entezam, successively Deputy Premier and Ambassador to Stockholm under Bazargan, was detained as a "CIA agent." Accused of the same infamy, Hassap Nazih, former director of National Iranian Oil Company, and Rahmatollah Moghadam-Maraghi, head of the small Radical Party, both of whom had supported if not actually fomented the December 1979 rebellion in the Azerbaijani capital of Tabriz, were obliged to flee the country. Ayatollah Shariatmadari, a rightist liberal in whose name the Azerbaijani sedition had erupted, was reduced to silence after "compromising documents" were mysteriously circulated in Tehran. The Muslim People's Republican Party, led by Shariatmadari's son, was obliged to close its doors after dozens of its members were executed or arrested. A number of elected deputies lost their parliamentary seats, again thanks to documents from the U.S. Embassy, making it possible to charge them with "intelligence with the enemy." Men such as Khosrow Kashgai, chief of the powerful tribe of the same name, and Admiral Ahmed Madani, a moderate who won more than two million votes in the presidential elections last January, were driven from the political scene. The list of the Islamic students' victims, too long to enumerate, testifies to their decisive role in the "second revolution." It also demonstrates the futility of Mr. Carter's efforts to end the Embassy occupation

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without being prepared to make Imam Khomeini any substantial offer.

The hostage affair rapidly became the principal cleavage separating Right from Left in domestic politics: all those who supported the Islamic students were in the good camp, on the side of anti-imperialism and the revolution, all the others could safely be labeled pro-Western counterrevolutionaries. In light of this, it is hardly surprising if few dared publicly to take a stand against the Embassy's occupation. The People's Mujahidin would have preferred the alternative of officially repudiating the some 900 agreements and contracts it claimed still tied Iran to the United States. Still, it saluted the November 4, 1979 event, although it later came to criticize the behavior of the Islamic students. The People's Fedayeen, who had ridiculed the superficial nature of Imam Khomeini's anti-imperialism in the early months, threw its entire weight behind the Embassy's occupiers after a few much remarked-upon hesitations. The moderate parties and public figures for the most part remained silent or adopted an attitude sufficiently ambiguous so as not to attract accusations of defending the United States. Only Mr. Bani-Sadr had the courage—or the imprudence—to state, as of November 6, that he disapproved of the seizure of hostages both on Islamic moral grounds and in the interests of the revolution. He lost no occasion to reiterate this opposition, and his relations with Imam Khomeini have not ceased to deteriorate since.

Paradoxically, Bani-Sadr—who had so vigorously fought Bazargan as head of the provisional government—has steered himself on a course strongly resembling the one which led the former premier to his ruin. He has thus laid himself wide open to his opponents, mainly the Islamic Republican Party and, above all, its President, Ayatollah Beheshti, who wasted no time relegating him to the dishonorable "liberal" camp. Predictably, they criticized him for his conciliatory attitude toward the United States, but also for his "illusions" concerning the possibility of close cooperation between Iran on the one hand and Europe and Japan on the other. Even his insistence on denouncing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was considered suspect, despite the fact that it was in keeping with the "neither East nor West" dogma of the militant clergy. In so doing, wasn't he trying to justify an indispensable normalization with the West in order to better cope with the peril from the East?

At the domestic level, Bani-Sadr has turned out to be as much

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a man of order as Bazargan. Immediately after his election as President of the Republic on January 25, 1979, he announced his intention of dissolving the Islamic committees and the "guardians of the revolution" (the militias) as soon as he had reorganized the armed forces, gendarmerie and the police. Two weeks later, he obtained the release of Mr. Minashi, the Minister of National Guidance who had been arrested as a CIA agent at the request of the Islamic students. Bani-Sadr later tried to protect other moderate figures such as Admiral Ahmed Madani and Khosrow Kashgai, but failed. Opposed to political violence on principle, Bani-Sadr declared on July 27: "Denunciations, slander, torture, violence, massacres, prisons, are nothing more than manifestations of a Stalinist society."

A good Muslim but marked by French culture, as was Mr. Bazargan, Bani-Sadr entertains mixed feelings about the Shi'ite clergy. At the "assembly of experts" formed to draw up the new constitution, he surprised friends and enemies by vigorously protesting against the wide powers proposed for the fagih (the religious guide of the state, presently Imam Khomeini). Despite his denials, he was later accused of having abstained from the vote on the constitutional article dealing with the fagih's powers, even though these were reduced compared to those provided for in the initial draft.

Whatever the case, Bani-Sadr has clearly taken a stand for the separation of powers and the non-interference of the clergy in affairs of state, to the point of deriding "the Richelieus and Mazarins who crowd the Iranian political scene." Just after his election to the presidency, he told this writer that he owed his "victory to the people," before adding that he thanked "the lower clergy for its support." The higher clergy, for him, is that which supports the Islamic Republic Party of Ayatollah Beheshti, his bitter enemy.

On the morrow of his election, Bani-Sadr proclaimed Ayatollah Beheshti "politically dead." His optimism did not seem unfounded at the time. Ayatollah Beheshti had just suffered three important setbacks: he had wanted to be a candidate in the presidential elections, but Imam Khomeini had forbidden religious leaders to seek this office. Next, he had put forward the candidacy of Jalaeddine Farsi, but Farsi was disqualified on account of his Afghan origins. Finally, he had backed the candidacy of Hassan Habibi, who got a mere ten percent of the vote against Bani-Sadr's 70 percent.

So when Bani-Sadr took office last January he thought he had

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won the final round. He asked Imam Khomeini's permission to form a second provisional government to last until the election of parliament. Such a measure would have enabled him to edge out the Revolutionary Council—principally made up of Ayatollah Beheshti's friends—and to carry on with the political and economic reforms of his choice. But Imam Khomeini refused to grant his request, and Bani-Sadr had to be satisfied with the limited "privilege" of presiding over the Revolutionary Council's meetings. Ayatollah Beheshti used his dominant position within the Council to thwart all of Bani-Sadr's initiatives and to build his own power base. He succeeded in getting the majority of the parliamentary seats attributed to his party in March 1980. Next, he got himself appointed head of the supreme court. Having thus wrested control of the judiciary and the legislature, he set out to capture the executive power. As a means of stripping the President of the last vestiges of his authority, reducing him to a mere figurehead, he demanded that the President's nominee for prime minister receive the prior endorsement of his party.

President Bani-Sadr resisted at every step. He contested the results of the legislative elections, but Imam Khomeini judged them "fair." He opposed new purges Beheshti's party called for in the administration and the various branches of the security forces, but he was obliged to yield when the Imam launched his appeal for a "cultural revolution" aimed at ridding the state of "counter-revolutionaries" and "Westernized liberals." In any case, the radicalization of the Islamic Republic had become inevitable after the American rescue mission last April 25, which highlighted the passivity or, as some claim, the complicity of the armed forces. In the six weeks following the American expedition, seven distinct plots were uncovered and several hundred officers arrested.

VII

The dangers threatening the Islamic Republic this summer were real enough. So was the overall deterioration of the political, economic and social situation. This journalist, in chance encounters with all strata of society—well-off and poor, urban and rural—heard nothing but complaints. The new agrarian reform decreed last winter had still not been applied in many regions of the country. Compared to the year preceding the revolution, state investments in agriculture had dropped by 20 percent, those in industry by 50 percent. Deprived of capital, spare parts (a consequence of the Western embargo) and competent managers, the factories of the public sector are operating on the average at less

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than half their capacity and for the most part are showing serious deficits.

The precise number of unemployed is unknown, but estimates vary between two and four million out of an active population of 11.5 million. The state pays a modest subsistence allowance to 800,000 of them; the others living by their wits or on the resources of their families. The inflation rate, officially estimated at 25 to 30 percent, in fact is believed to approach the level which set the middle classes against the Shah: 50 percent or more for the well-off housewife's consumer basket. Rents, which had dropped considerably after the fall of the monarchy, are almost as high today as they were in 1977-78. Prices of certain food items such as fresh vegetables, flour, meat and fruit have soared to unprecedented levels.

The middle classes suffer more than others from the rising cost of living because of their consumption patterns. Wage earners, like government employees (1.4 million, including members of the armed forces), have seen their buying power seriously reduced not only by inflation but also by the halving of higher salaries and the elimination of overtime and various benefits—measures which were adopted with an eye both to fairness and economy. Indeed, the state has been running at a deficit since the reduction of oil exports. The total revenues of the government, \$21 billion this year, were not even sufficient to pay the civil servants. Unable to sell more oil, the government was obliged to take out loans or dip into its reserves, reduced to some \$7 billion since the Iranian assets in American banks (about \$8 billion) were frozen.

The economic situation has thus sharply deteriorated since the fall of the Bazargan government, despite the instructions Imam Khomeini issued immediately afterwards, enjoining the authorities to "assure the well-being of the *mostazefin*" (the disinherited). The Imam refrained from appointing a new government and thus gave free rein to the Council of the Revolution and the high dignitaries of the clergy who had his confidence. It was at that point that mullahs were appointed everywhere—in the armed forces, the police, the administration, in large industrial complexes and in almost all the ministries—to supervise and check up on the secular authorities. Anarchy grew as a result, and, as one highly placed official remarked to this writer, "no one was obeying anyone anymore."

The state administration was virtually paralyzed by the inertia—voluntary or otherwise—of civil servants, many of whom no doubt consciously sought to undermine the regime. Strikes mul-

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tiplied in state factories and public services. Daily cuts in electricity and running water antagonized the inhabitants of Tehran and other cities. The *pasdarans* (Islamic militias), loyal to rival decision centers, most often acted as they pleased. Certain army units refused to fight the Kurdish insurgents. During the summer the state was in an advanced state of decomposition while a series of military coups were uncovered, with ramifications in the political arena. Most serious of all was the possibility that popular discontent would be directed at the clergy, who would be held responsible for the deterioration of the situation.

Against this background Imam Khomeini's declaration of July 21, 1980, is more readily understood: "None of the present ministers is a revolutionary . . . and if the next government resembles this one, we can give the Islamic Republic up for lost, for we will be beaten." One also understands the significance of the massive purges, the arrests, the collective executions, the attacks against the offices of political parties, both Right and Left—those very parties that would benefit from the collapse of the Islamic Republic.

The moderate nationalists, principal targets of the "cultural revolution" unleashed in July, are considered the most dangerous. Indeed, their influence is pervasive in the economic centers, the state administration, the armed forces, the universities—in short, those areas traditionally dominated by the middle and upper middle classes, by the "Westernized" elites hostile to clerical power and socioeconomic upheavals. Their discontent—diffuse within the country because in the circumstances there is no figure to voice it—has been given focus in opposition groups abroad. Two daily broadcasts, one in the name of General Oveissi, the other in the name of Shahpur Bakhtiar, are beamed into Iran from "clandestine" radios in Iraqi territory and are very widely listened to by the population. It is no secret that Oveissi and Bakhtiar, among others, maintain close relations with the tribes and with civil and military groups—groups which, given more favorable circumstances, could possibly bring down the regime.

Despite the significant strides made by the Left these past months, its prospects are not bright—at least not in the foreseeable future. Unlike the Right, its social base is relatively limited. The Islamic movement, symbolized in the person of Imam Khomeini, has not lost the support of the less favored classes despite the disappointment and frustrations accumulating since the founding of the republic. The workers have not forgotten that their salaries in most cases have doubled since the revolution. Peasants receive

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generous subsidies—an average of 50 percent higher than they received under the Shah. Those who do not yet own land have not lost hope of benefiting from future agrarian reforms. As a result of the abundant rainfalls last winter and spring, the harvests are expected to be 20 to 30 percent greater this year than last. Above all, the *mostazefin* now feel they are living in “their own” republic, protected by Imam Khomeini.

Nonetheless, the People's Mujahidin, a Muslim movement with a very radical ideology, has managed within a few months to become a mass party, particularly feared by Imam Khomeini, to judge from his denunciations of “Islam-Marxists.” This June, the head of the movement, Massud Radjavi, was able to assemble 150,000 followers and sympathizers in a public meeting which had not even been announced by the mass media. The prestige of the Mujahidin is high, both because of the armed struggle it waged against the Shah, and because of the positions—resolutely favorable to the poorest class—it has adopted ever since the birth of the Republic. Nonetheless, the youth and inexperience of its cadres, coupled with the political errors they have committed, limit their possibilities of action, at least for the time being.

The Tudeh (communist) Party is smaller and has a much more limited following, but its influence has on several occasions proved far more decisive. Its cadres, generally trained in Eastern Europe, are of high quality. Perfectly informed about the international situation, capable of clearly formulating strategy and tactics and of applying them with unwavering discipline, they have been able to take advantage of the anti-American tide that has engulfed Iran in order to make friends and allies, even within the clergy. It has been noted that Imam Khomeini has never attacked the Tudeh by name—at least not as of mid-August 1980. When he denounces the communists, whom he sometimes calls the “American Left,” he is especially aiming at the People's Fedayeen (Marxist-Leninist) which took up arms against the authorities in Kurdistan and elsewhere. His seeming indulgence for the orthodox communists can be explained by at least three facts: they have consistently supported him ever since his departure for exile in 1964 (their “clandestine” radio, probably located in East Germany, regularly broadcast his declarations recorded in Iraq); they are determined, like him, to “extirpate the very roots of American imperialism” in Iran; they have offered their help in defending and consolidating the Islamic Republic.

Two events occurring in rapid succession last June increased the Tudeh's margin of maneuver: the People's Fedayeen and the

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Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) were both shaken by internal dissent. After long and arduous debates, the majority of the Fedayeen's leadership decided to adopt an "anti-imperialist" political line practically identical to Tudeh's. The same took place within the KDP, triggering the schism of the minority faction, which accused the majority (led by Abdel Rahman Ghassemlou) of cooperating with Iraq and NATO. The importance of these divisions is that they strengthened the Tudeh's authority and hence its ability to come to the rescue of a tottering republic.

Imam Khomeini certainly does not wish to be dependent on any non-Islamic group, particularly a Marxist one. His behavior from the very beginning of his political struggle in the 1960s shows his intention of reserving the monopoly on power for the "authentic Muslims." Whether or not he will be able to achieve this goal remains to be seen. The Islamic Republican Party, on which he seems to want to lean, is not a structured mass party, but rather a collection of various religious and secular individuals and groups with diverging if not actually contradictory tendencies. Ayatollah Beheshti's party has consequently been unable to come up with a political, economic and social program, which is indispensable for any government party. More important, he cannot count on the support of a sufficient number of cadres to administer the state. The Iranian intelligentsia, refractory or hostile to the Islamic regime from its very outset, is split between the liberal Right and the Left, Marxist and otherwise.

VIII

Given Imam Khomeini's apparent determination not to share power with either of these two currents, the situation seems to be heading toward an impasse. A coup d'état in the immediate future seems doomed to failure. The high echelons of the army are divided, and the rank and file remains—until proof to the contrary—loyal to the Imam.

The question of how Imam Khomeini's eventual disappearance from politics would affect the Iranian situation has often been raised. At the very least, the response to this question is risky. The plethora of forces on the political scene, each one obeying its own internal and evolving dynamic, makes it impossible to hazard any valid prognosis for the medium or long term. The most that can be done is to evaluate the balance of forces such as it exists today and could remain for the near future.

As of mid-August, three phenomena could be noted: the decline in the prestige of the clergy as an instrument of government; the

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strengthening position of the leftist parties as a whole, but nowhere near the point of offering a credible alternative to Islamic rule; and the persistent influence of the moderate nationalists and the Right—liberal or otherwise—in the state institutions and economic centers of decision. This last category would thus appear the only one with a serious chance of taking control in the event of Khomeini's disappearance, especially since in all probability it would be supported by a good part of the army and a not inconsiderable part of the clergy. It should not be forgotten that the other five "grand ayatollahs" besides Khomeini all either disapprove of or are hostile to the Imam's religious and political concepts.

Yet for all that, a victory of the Right would by no means be assured. A great deal would depend on its own actions. If it follows Khomeini's "anti-imperialist line," satisfies the demands of the minorities, and guarantees the continued existence of the leftist parties, its chances of success would be increased. Otherwise, the obstacles in its path would probably be insurmountable. The Muslim and Marxist Left, supported by segments of the ethnic minorities and part of the clergy, is strong enough to keep the country in a state of anarchy comparable to that prevailing at present.

The role of the U.S.S.R. could weigh heavily in this regard. Up to the present, Moscow has treated Khomeini's republic with kid gloves, generally restraining itself from responding to the criticisms, attacks and threats showered upon it, particularly concerning Afghanistan. The Kremlin's tactic seems to have been to wait for the end of the power struggle in Iran while hoping to reap the fruits of America's errors. If a definitely unfriendly—i.e., pro-American—government took over in Tehran, undoubtedly the Soviet Union would no longer hesitate to support all the forces hostile to the new rulers. The major leftist movements—the Mujahidin, Fedayeen and Tudeh—already favor a tactical or strategic alliance with the socialist camp. Moreover, pro-Soviet sympathies are far from negligible in the provinces of Kurdistan, Guilan, Mazandaran and even Azerbaijan. In the light of all this, the civil war which would be triggered by the installation of any Pinochet-type regime would undoubtedly be long and, perhaps, even dangerous to world peace.

Thus, the prospects with or without Khomeini seem bleak indeed. The wisest course for the international community is surely patience, and most especially nonintervention in a country still in the throes of revolution. All things considered, the lesser of all evils for the Western powers is surely to leave to the Iranians themselves the freedom to determine their own future.

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